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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001961

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STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/08/2017
TAGS: EAID KDEM PGOV AF
SUBJECT: JUNE 12 INCIDENT IN NANGARHAR

Classified By: A/DCM Carol Rodley for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) An Afghan police unit became engaged with Coalition Forces during a nighttime operation on June 12 in Nangarhar Province, leading to the death of 7 and injury of 4 police. The Governor quickly held a press conference, then met with the PRT and Special Troop Battalion Commanders. The Governor expressed his distress at what had happened, but listed a number of measures he will take to assist in mitigating the negative reactions sure to come. The incident is especially unfortunate following on two other incidents in the province in which innocent civilians were killed by Coalition Forces.
END SUMMARY

THE INCIDENT

¶2. (C) In the early hours of June 12, Afghan police in the Sherzad District of Nangarhar Province mistakenly thought that Coalition Forces on a nighttime operation were Taliban, and the police opened fire. The CF returned fire, and ultimately killed 7 and wounded 4 of the policemen from Unit 03, a police unit working closely with ISAF forces in several provinces. The CF also arrested one of the police, assuming he was an insurgent.

GOVERNOR WORKING TO CONTAIN REACTION

¶3. (SBU) Governor Sherzai held a press conference early in the morning and announced that Afghan and CF forces had been on a joint operation and that a misunderstanding had led to the incident involving the death and injury of some Afghan police. A few hours later, the Governor met with the PRT and CF, the PRT Pol Rep, and Col. Muhamaduallh, Deputy Commander of Afghan Police Unit 03. The Governor reported that the Minister of the Interior and the Office of the President had advised him to quickly hold a press conference so that others don't "mold the story."

¶4. (SBU) During the meeting, the Governor said that the CF had called him very early to report the incident. He admitted he was distressed by it, but still supported the Coalition and would do what he could to help overcome its negative effects. He said that he had already given \$12,000 to the families of the victims for initial funeral expenses, and that his Deputy Governor, Police Chief, and several line directors had already traveled to the district to try to prevent demonstrations or attacks. He said that the ISAF and CF always have "our support," and that Afghan Forces want to have joint operations, but should be put in front, with ISAF and CF backing them up.

¶5. (SBU) The Governor also announced that he would hold a Shura on Sunday, June 17, inviting 10 tribal elders and leaders from each of the 22 districts in Nangarhar Province to discuss the incident, as well as a ceremony in the next few days to honor the families of those killed and injured. Most of the policemen in this unit were not local to the Sherzad but had been combined from throughout the province.

INITIAL FALLOUT

¶6. (SBU) Initial negative reactions include some police and trainees resigning from the force, or refusing to continue in CF-sponsored training. The Unit 03 commander in the neighboring district of Khogyani has publicly denounced the government. Night letters delivered in Khogyani district blamed ISAF forces at a small base there for the deaths though they had nothing to do with the operation and had been working hard to improve relations in the area. The Governor requested that the three trucks destroyed in the operation be

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replaced, and asked for support in getting the MOI to distribute the vehicles they are holding that are designated for the district administrators.

¶7. (C) Col. Preysler, Commander of Task Force Bayonet (the successor to CJTF-82's Task Force Spartan) based at Jalalabad's Fenty Airfield, held a meeting in the evening of June 12 with representatives from the different U.S. government agencies involved. The various elements discussed what actually happened, and what measures can be taken to prevent such an incident in the future. PRT Commander Phillips reported that he is working to get an accurate list of all those injured or killed in order to make solatia payments to the families as quickly as possible.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) The timing of this incident is unfortunate since the CF assessed it had finally "turned the corner" following two unfortunate incidents involving the deaths of civilians. (NOTE: These include the March 4 and the April 29 incident in the Markoh Bazaar area.) The deaths and injuries of members of local police, who were supported by the PRT and BSTB, is likely to cast a pall over relations in the area. At virtually every shura or gathering the PRT attends, local Afghans protest against the night operations conducted by CF, and ask that operations be done during the daylight hours and led by Afghan police. The incident has been widely and in general accurately reported in the international media. A quick expression of regret, in addition to the ongoing investigation and press release last evening support the PRT and TF Bayonet efforts to overcome past incidents of collateral damage. Repairing the damage to the confidence of local Afghans in the Coalition's contribution to peace and stability could take months.

¶9. (C) CJTF-82 Comment: The situation is not simple. Night

operations are the only option for dealing with some of the insurgent forces, especially when taking into consideration CF protection and enemy early warning networks. In fact in some cases night operations against high risk targets actually minimizes the potential for civilian casualties. Finally, it is worth note that while the three incidents addressed in this cable all took place in Nangarhar Province they were all separate events and need to be analyzed as such in order to learn the way ahead. END COMMENT.

WOOD